Parish elections are often seen as deadly dull, even in more serious historiography. However, in his latest article Jonah Miller ('Suffrage and the secret ballot in eighteenth-century London parishes', *Historical Journal*, 67 (2024), 42–61) completely debunks this stereotype. Drawing evidence from litigation and legal disputes before London's consistory court, the vicar general's court and the Court of Arches, Miller paints a quite different picture of parish elections as the cradle of some key democratic innovations that we normally associate with the nineteenth century. They were, for instance, much more inclusive than the parliamentary elections, since women were, albeit under certain circumstances, allowed to vote, and the same held true for Dissenters, Jews and other minorities. As all these groups were excluded from taking part in local elections, an important factor in explaining this uncommon open-mindedness was the ratepayer franchise. Basically, everyone who was able to pay taxes towards relief of the parish poor or for the repair of the parish church was allowed to vote. Obviously, some parishes were stricter than others, but the principle provided a loophole for individuals and groups to participate in parish elections from which they were normally barred. Miller also shows that parishes were experimenting with secret ballots long before the practice became common in other elections.

In the last few decades, the history of policing has received its fair share of attention, especially in France, where the registration of foreigners had already become an important political priority during Louis XIV's reign. While the actions of the police on the ground have been thoroughly examined, less is known about the paperwork involved. Marie-Elisabeth Jacquet and Goulven Kérien have tapped into the immense archives of the Parisian police to trace the long-term evolution in this *travail de bureau* ('Enregistrer pour policer: usage du register et travail de bureau à la Lieutenance générale de police de Paris, 1730–1760', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 70 (2023), 68–93). Especially in the second half of the eighteenth-century, bureaucratization boomed in the department of the *recherche des voleurs* that dealt with larceny. Paperwork was introduced in an attempt to keep under control the surge of thefts, robberies and burglaries, which was, in itself, a result of the economic slump of the 1730s and 1740s. To increase the efficiency of their police-work, Parisian detectives started to use a range of registers to record their activities: *procès-verbaux* or minutes of their patrols, records of all stolen objects, *registres des quartiers* (for each neighbourhood), files about individual criminals and various other administrative tools. The reorganization of the department was so successful that the administrative procedures of the *recherche des voleurs* soon became the norm for other police services in Paris, in France and in the rest of Europe. It is a perfect illustration of how bureaucratization snowballed in early modern Europe.

Information is also centre stage in the latest article by Basil Bowdler and Arthur der Weduwen ('The ambassador and the press: printed diplomatic letters and the entanglement of public and private news provision in the late seventeenth-century Dutch Republic', *The Seventeenth Century*, 39 (2024), 115–41). According to many

contemporary observers, the Dutch Republic was a buzzing information society where the latest news about political, economic and social issues spread like wildfire via a dense network of information channels. Printed reports by Dutch diplomats, giving accounts of the latest developments on their foreign postings for the States General, were one of these channels. Most historians have ignored these sources and have focused instead on the private correspondence between the envoy, on the one side, and the Grand Pensionaries (the 'prime ministers'), the Stadtholder or the *Griffier* (the registrar), on the other, since they were thought to receive full accounts, while the printed reports were only a bland ersatz. It is an undeserved cliché, according to Bowdler and der Weduwen, who launched the first, in-depth research of these sources. Their analysis shows a well-oiled machinery, since Jacobus Scheltus (the *Statendrukker*, or the printer of the States General) published the diplomatic dispatches that came from far and wide with great care and regularity. Yet, Bowdler and der Weduwen show that these official information channels were not necessarily quicker or better informed than the commercial ones. Newspapers such as the *Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant* were able to print the same reports – although in a more concise form – at almost the same moment as the *Statendrukker.* Moreover, the quality of the information was remarkably high, with few or no omissions. The findings also endorse the reputation of the Dutch Republic as one of the most efficient early modern information societies.

Inequality in early modern Europe has become one of the most discussed topics in socio-economic history in the last few decades. Felix Schaff explores the relationship between political structures and wealth inequality in pre-industrial German cities ('Urban political structure and inequality: political economy lessons from early modern German cities', *Journal of Economic History*, 84 (2024), 517–53). Schaff tries to answer the question of whether – and how – more closed, oligarchic governments, where political power was concentrated among the elites, led to more wealth inequality. Data are drawn from no less than 33 German cities, and from an in-depth analysis of the city-state Nördlingen between 1579 and 1700. Schaff's findings indeed endorse the hypothesis that wealth concentration among the upper classes was much greater in cities without democratic elections. In Nördlingen, the political elites who held the main offices enriched themselves substantially, further widening the wealth gap. Moments of socio-economic and political upheaval such as the Thirty Years War provided extra opportunities for elites to exploit public resources for personal gain, exacerbating inequality during times of crisis. Schaff's article thereby challenges the idea that early modern urban elites were civic-minded leaders who acted in the public's best interest. Instead, he suggests that closed political systems allowed office-holders to prioritize personal wealth accumulation, leading to long-term social and economic inequality. The findings contribute to broader discussions on how political power can fuel inequality, especially in pre-industrial societies.

Inequality is also at the heart of an article by Martin Andersson and Jakob Molinder, who provide the first comprehensive estimate of income distribution in pre-industrial Sweden ('Swedish income inequality in 1613', *Economic History Review*, 77 (2024), 1336–61). Using data from the 1613 Älvsborg ransom taxation, it reveals that Sweden exhibited relatively low levels of income inequality compared to other early modern European societies. This was due to the relatively limited economic power of the nobility, clergy and burghers, alongside a large and economically homogeneous class of landed peasants. Key findings include the fact that the top 1 per cent of the population controlled 13.2 per cent of incomes, while the lower

90 per cent enjoyed a significantly larger share than in comparable societies. Sweden's unique political and social structure, which integrated peasants as a parliamentary Fourth Estate, contributed to this broader distribution of income. Andersson and Molinder demonstrate how combining social tables and individual tax assessments provides a nuanced view of inequality, capturing the distribution of income across various social classes and within elite groups. They also contrast Sweden's income distribution with other early modern European contexts, concluding that limited urbanization, a small landless population and strong peasant influence mitigated inequality. These findings offer crucial insights into the socio-economic dynamics of state formation and economic organization in early modern Sweden.

The British industrial revolution takes centre stage in Emrah Gülsunar's 'To block or not: why the British ruling elite enabled the industrial revolution during the eighteenth century', *European Review of Economic History*, 28 (2024), 335–59. Gülsunar explores why British elites supported, rather than obstructed, industrialization. Traditionally, ruling classes in other nations often curbed economic developments to maintain control, yet British elites fostered industrial growth. Gülsunar puts three common explanations under the microscope: economic self-interest, political security and international competition. Through a textual analysis of British parliamentary legislation and debates concerning the cotton industry, he argues that British elites primarily aimed to sustain economic competitiveness and prevent unemployment, thus promoting social order and economic strength. The article draws fresh data from parliamentary acts, debates and journals, revealing that the ruling elite perceived industrial advancement, particularly in cotton, as an essential condition for national and social stability. Protectionist policies, tax considerations and machinery protection laws were driven by these public motives. While elites prioritized political stability and job creation, they also faced lobbying from various socio-economic groups, seeking a balance between public responsibility and private interest. Gülsunar's research contributes to the discourse on why industrialization first thrived in Britain, illustrating how British politics balanced competing interests and underscoring a unique departure from rent-seeking behaviours observed elsewhere. This nuanced view enriches our understanding of the distinct socio-economic dynamics of the British industrial revolution and the pivotal role of elite decision-making in fostering early industrial growth.

Another 'major revolution' is scrutinized in Mattia Viale's latest article ('Stocks and flows: material culture and consumption behaviour in early modern Venice', *Economic History Review*, 77 (2024), 416–43). Usually, the early modern consumer revolution is associated with the core regions in the North Sea area. However, Mattia Viale shifts the focus to Venice. He uses post-mortem inventories and household budgets to analyse the material culture and consumption behaviour of Venetian households. Despite Italy's economic decline, Venetian households enjoyed a rich material culture comparable to that of more dynamic European economies, like the Dutch Republic or England. Viale argues that there was no sudden 'consumer revolution' but rather a gradual 'consumer evolution'. While new products and trends were adopted, consumption patterns remained stable and refined, building on habits that had already begun during the Renaissance. The author shows that refined consumption practices were not limited to Europe's wealthier economies but were present even in regions like Venice, which were experiencing economic decline. Viale concludes that the diffusion throughout society of new consumption practices was a necessary but insufficient condition for economic growth. His research suggests

that economic development and the rise in consumption were not necessarily causally linked, challenging the idea that the 'consumer revolution' was a driving force behind economic progress.

Labour is a recurring theme in socio-economic history. Stan Pannier takes the relatively small harbour of Ostend in the Austrian Netherlands as a case-study to test some classic hypotheses about maritime labour markets ('Reaping the returns of a runaway economy. Seamen's wages in the Ostend merchant marine, 1775–1785', *TSEG – The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History*, 21 (2024), 41–69). Much has been written about sailors' wages in the past, but most of this research has focused on England, France, the Dutch Republic and other established maritime powers, with the large overseas companies often centre stage. Pannier offers a fresh perspective by focusing on the private ship owners of one of the smaller players in the maritime world – Ostend. Not an obvious source, since the lion's share of the Ostend archives was destroyed during World War II, but Pannier is very successful in squeezing all sorts of details from the notary archives and the Prize Papers. It yields some interesting results. For example, the Ostend material endorses the classic hypothesis that although the wages of sailors remained remarkably stable in the long term, they could rise dramatically in times of war. Ostend was able to take advantage of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–84), since its ships could sail under a neutral flag. It led to a boom in harbour activities, but also to a chronic shortage of sailors. Wages soon doubled or tripled. At the same time, the recruitment area broadened from a predominantly national to an international one, as Dutch, French, German and other sailors were drawn to Ostend by the economic boom. Pannier also shows that individual sailors had some agency to turn wage negotiations in their favour, since payrolls show slight variations between seaman according to their skills, the length and destination of the journey and other variables.

Water is also at stake in Carry van Lieshout's most recent article ('Historical geographies of large infrastructure in the long eighteenth century: the case of water in Britain', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 58 (2024), 57–62), which focuses on the booming water supply in early modern London. During the eighteenth century, the commercial infrastructure to provide households with fresh drinking water spread rapidly in the metropolis. At the close of the century, nearly three-quarters of London houses north of the Thames were already connected to the system. Lieshout argues that the failure or success of these particular water companies often depended on the geography of the neighbourhood and their ability to harness new technology. For example, the Chelsea Waterworks Company could draw upon its experience in water-raising steam technology, the result of their investments in the mines in the west of England. Lieshout also shows that once in place (water) infrastructure was not always used in a way that had been foreseen by its designers or operators. Water companies had to spend a lot of time policing access to their water supply, since some households shared their tap with neighbours, while pipes were often illegally tapped by people living nearby.

Migration is also a topical theme in socio-economic history. That is also the case for Britain, although not every region of origin has been thoroughly scrutinized. In their latest article, Tim Reinke-Williams and William Farrell use new evidence from the ROLLCO (Records of London's Livery Companies Online) database to map Welsh migration to London in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ('Apprentice migration to London from Wales, 1600–1800', *Social History*, 49 (2024), 466–89). They meticulously compare their findings with textbook-wisdom about regional

migration in early modern Britain. For example, the Welsh influx followed a similar chronological path as the general pattern, with the early seventeenth century (*c.* 1600–40) as a 'golden age' of migration, while numbers slowly but surely decreased after the Civil Wars. The ebb and flow is likely to have been the result of similar causes: population growth forced people into migration in the early seventeenth century, while a series of harvest failures eased the demographic pressure in the later decades. Evidence for occupations seems to corroborate this explanation, since 25 per cent of the fathers of Welsh apprentices had an agricultural background, while 6 per cent had a titled status. Reinke-Williams and Farrell's research also seems to debunk the idea that chain migration played a decisive role in migration patterns, since the surname of the apprentice and the master matched in only 4.7 per cent of the cases, although Welsh apprentices did cluster together in certain occupations (especially in the textile trades). Finally, it is fascinating that only 1.6 per cent used their Welsh name to register in one of the livery companies, which seems to suggest that these immigrants were able to speak English or, at least, have their names recorded in English. It implies that they were eager to blend in.

Merchant communities from Venice in seventeenth-century Istanbul are scrutinized in the latest contribution of Tommaso Stefini ('Defining "Ottomans" and "foreigners": Venetian merchants, jurisdictional conflicts, and legal belonging in seventeenth-century Istanbul', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 28 (2024), 279–304). Stefini investigates a major legal conflict between 1613 and 1617, wherein Ottoman authorities sought to impose the Islamic head tax (*harac*) on European merchants, challenging their exemption under international treaties (or 'Capitulations'). The absence of standardized citizenship systems in both the Ottoman Empire and Europe meant that legal belonging was fluid, negotiated through social and economic actions and contingent upon local norms. Stefini argues that these conflicts helped to create an early corpus of 'international private law', blending Islamic legal principles, Ottoman sultanic legislation and European diplomatic practices. Notably, this law was not Eurocentric but evolved through dynamic Ottoman–European interactions, underscoring the Ottoman Empire's dominant position in the Mediterranean. Stefini's conclusion emphasizes that legal belonging in early modern Istanbul was a contested and evolving process influenced by inter-imperial relations, economic priorities and shifting political contexts. The article highlights the broader significance of the Ottoman contribution to the legal norms governing state membership before the nineteenth-century rise of European imperialism.

Methodologies from the digital humanities have gained momentum in almost every subdiscipline of history, even if they are not always convincing. However, the 3D techniques used in Weixum Li and Chiara Piccoli's latest article are very persuasive ('Placing value in domestic interiors. 3D spatial mapping of Pieter de Graeff and Jacoba Bicker's home art collection', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*, 139 (2024), 4–37). Tapping evidence from an exceptional body of sources – including almanacs, post-mortem inventories and the imposing building at the Herengracht in Amsterdam – Li and Piccoli try to reconstruct the famous art collection of Pieter de Graeff and Jacoba Bicker, who belonged to the most influential, elite families of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Great effort went into a detailed reconstruction of how these paintings were distributed in the house in order to endorse or refute Montias and Loughman's classic hypothesis. Drawing on the evidence of post-mortem inventories, Montias and Loughman concluded that the most precious artworks were displayed in *front-stage* rooms in the front parlours on

the ground floor, while the lesser masters were reserved for the *back-stage* rooms on the upper floors. Li and Piccoli's research shows, however, that this classic hypothesis is due for revision. Pieter de Bicker and Jacoba de Graeff had some very precious artwork – paintings, but mainly tapestries – on show in the parallel rooms flanking their *voorhuis* (the entrance hall) on the ground floor, which served as an arena for the display of the family's immense wealth and (aristocratic) prestige, yet their value was dwarfed by the paintings that were displayed on the first floor in the *groote kamer* (large room) where portraits of the most illustrious ancestors (painted by famous Dutch masters) and the coats of arms were displayed. They served as tokens of the family's affluence and political power. Yet, paintings also seem to have had an emotional resonance, since the couple carefully selected some canvasses with a more personal touch – a portrait of their baby, landscapes of their estates and other favourite paintings – for the *groote kamer* or for their bedrooms.

Digital humanities also form the methodological backbone of Silke Geven's article about location patterns of medical professions in early modern Antwerp ('Ruimte voor genezing. De geografische spreiding en toegankelijkheid van de Antwerpse medische markt tussen 1584 en 1796', *Stadsgeschiedenis*, 19 (2024), 93–112). Not much has been written about the distribution of doctors, barber surgeons, druggists and midwives across the city, except for Patrick Wallis' research on apothecaries in early modern London. Geven provides a fresh perspective in this debate by combining the archives of medical professions with data from tax registers and other sources from the late sixteenth century to the end of the *ancien régime.* In line with broader trends in the commercial development of the city, the medical sector witnessed a boom in the eighteenth century, and doctors, druggists and other medical professions moved from the city centre to colonize almost every neighbourhood in the city. While apothecaries and druggists opened their shops in the most popular shopping streets, doctors and midwives do not appear to have had a fixed preference for the location of their practices. From a consumer perspective, accessibility was not always a priority. For example, the housekeeping books of the wealthy Plantin-Moretus family demonstrate that the reputation of doctors, apothecaries and other medical providers was much more important than their proximity.

Aaron Columbus examines how parishes in London used pesthouses in response to the plague from 1600 to 1650 ('To be had for a pesthouse for the use of this parish: plague pesthouses in early Stuart London (c. 1600–1650)', *Urban History*, 51 (2024), 125–45). Pesthouses were quarantine facilities for people infected with the plague. Their use reflects the early development of public health policies in London, as well as the complex relationship between local and national authorities. The article discusses the limited attention given to pesthouses in plague studies and aims to address this gap by focusing on their role in suburban parishes outside the City of London's jurisdiction. These suburban areas were particularly affected by poverty and recurrent outbreaks of the plague. The City of London's primary pesthouse, located in St Giles Cripplegate, was often ignored by suburban parishes, leading some parishes to build their own pesthouses to handle the sick more effectively. The author highlights the challenges of plague management in London's growing suburbs and the limited capacity of the City's pesthouses. It also emphasizes the flexible and independent responses of suburban parishes, where local governance often took precedence over centralized orders. The article sheds light on how pesthouses were a part of wider public health measures, though they often catered primarily for the poor.

In the same journal, Gabrielle Robilliard explores the evolution of coffeehouses in Hamburg (1677–1714) as dynamic sites of public engagement during the early Enlightenment ('Novel, popular, fashionable, and partisan: making coffeehouses "burgherly" spaces in early modern Hamburg', *Urban History*, 51 (2024), 146–70). Robilliard examines how these spaces introduced novel forms of sociability and communication that challenged established bourgeois values and generated social tension. Using micro-historical methods, she analyses licensing records, government debates and satirical texts to show that Hamburg's coffeehouses did not just serve exotic drinks, but became hotbeds of political discourse, partisan debate and cultural exchange. Unlike Jürgen Habermas, whose idealized 'public sphere' emphasized reasoned debate, Robilliard argues that Hamburg's coffeehouses cultivated a more unruly atmosphere. Music, dancing and animated discussions contributed to a vibrant yet contested space that blurred boundaries between acceptable and suspect sociability. Amid Hamburg's political and religious divisions, the city's authorities attempted to regulate these coffeehouses to maintain social order, introducing new governance measures in 1709–10. Robilliard's article provides insights into how early coffeehouses intersected with Hamburg's broader social tensions, including the city's shifting power dynamics and struggles over civic honour and control. It contributes to the historical discourse on public spaces by highlighting coffeehouses as fluid environments that amplified social and political divides, rather than being mere centres of Enlightenment rationalism.

In her latest article, Suzanne Rochefort ('La scène et la ville: les comédiens, des acteurs de l'actualité urbaine', *Histoire urbaine*, 69 (2024), 35–51) focuses on developments in the theatrical scene in Paris, where the fading of the royal monopolies of the *Opéra*, the *Comédie-Française* and the *Comédie-Italienne* resulted in a feverish commercialization of the sector. New theatres were mushrooming, while the number of performances multiplied. At the same time, the public became more demanding and the cry for novelty reached a new crescendo. This created fresh opportunities and challenges for impresarios, actors and other performers. Theatre managers were forced to come up with advertising campaigns, using posters, handbills and newspaper advertisements, which stressed the newness of their stage plays, while also vying for some good reviews. Commercialization also affected the performers. Actors – and actresses – became public figures, whose health was closely discussed in the *Journal de Paris* and other periodicals. Medical certificates were required for occasional absences and thoroughly checked by the police. These special forces were also present to suppress potential uproar and turbulence at the theatre. Quite often, the disturbances were stirred up by malcontent performers: the growing competition between the theatres led to occasional congestion in cash flows, resulting in serious lags in the payment of their wages – and they used the stage to voice their grievances.

Wills not only shed light on the chattels and goods that early modern people cherished during their lifetimes, but also brim with expressions of care, love, disappointment, frustration and hope. Drawing evidence from more than a hundred wills from London's craft and mercantile communities, Elizabeth Debold delves deep into this emotional content ('"But by the eyes of his trustees": the emotions and post-mortem strategies of will-writing in Restoration London, 1660–1700', *Cultural and Social History*, 21 (2024), 319–39). Through their wills, the deceased – from well-to-do to lower-middle-class backgrounds – tried to exert some influence beyond the grave. Mourning rings were given to keep the memory of the deceased alive, while all sorts of stipulations were included in the will to ensure that the heirs would act in the

way their dead relative had wished. Through these terms, the beneficiaries were urged to marry wisely, to care for an elder relative or to live a better life. Quite often, an executor was appointed to ensure that the provisions were properly met. In all these transactions, early modern dying men and women used a series of emotions to control the future of their kin and to extend their reach from beyond the grave.

Emotions also feature in Bernard Capp's latest research on the experience of early modern blind men and women ('Blind lives: the sightless and society in early modern England', *The Seventeenth Century*, 39 (2024), 695–717). Capp argues that the existing historiography often focuses on the philosophical, religious or medical aspects of blindness, while little is known about the lived experience of the blind themselves. Drawing on new evidence from a range of fragmentary sources – life-writing, but also administrative and court records – from early modern England, Capp tries to shed more light on this issue by focusing on emotions, coping strategies and social networks. Despite Capp's efforts, the evidence on emotions remains sparse. Frustration and anxiety for the future were the most common emotions experienced by early modern men and women who slowly but surely lost their sight, and these negative emotions usually gave way to acceptance and resignation as the years passed. More information can be found on the coping strategies of the visually impaired. Obviously, adaption was less complicated for the upper classes of society, as wealthy men or women could hire a personal assistant, which made daily life somewhat easier. When struck by blindness, some of the high-ranking officials, tradesmen and other elites could even continue working with the help of an amanuensis.

Opportunities were fewer on the lower rungs of the social ladder. Craftsmen who were forced to give up their former trade and to look for a simpler – and thus lower-paid – job occupied the best-case scenario, while those who were forced into begging or stealing found themselves in the worst situation. For women, prostitution was often the only survival strategy. Apart from socio-economic differences, failure or success in adapting to a visual imparity also depended on one's social network. Family, friends or neighbours often played a crucial role in cushioning the hardest blows, and those who lost their sight could also appeal to parish relief, almshouses or hospitals. Yet, many must have slipped through the cracks and sunk into destitution.

Although attacks on sacred buildings and religious staff were strictly forbidden under martial law, such legal codes were often a dead letter in times of war. During conflicts, churches were often plundered, vandalized or lay in ruins. In her latest article, Bridget Heal focuses on the material – and symbolic – destruction of Lutheran temples in Brandenburg during the Thirty Years War ('Lutheran churches during the Thirty Years War', *German History*, 42 (2024), 161–80). Unlike the stereotype of ruthless, all-destroying war, most churches survived the ravages of war without too much harm, since they were considered by both friends and foe as far too precious to be burnt down. In most cases damage was limited to acts of vandalism and plunder. In the post-war years, repairs were quickly undertaken with the help of local nobles, collections among the parishioners or relief programmes set up by neighbouring cities. Despite the Lutheran creed that objects held no sacred power, much time and money was invested in restoring the altarpieces, pews, chalices and other treasures that had been plundered or destroyed. Lutheran clerics also took great pains to safeguard the parish records or the *Taufbücher* (baptism), *Traubücher* (weddings) and *Totenbücher* (deaths). Quite often, the Thirty Years War was also actively commemorated in various churches through the tombs of war heroes, cannonballs, swords, and other material relics.